



# Belonging

A PLACE TO BELONG NEWSLETTER NO 24

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## Pizza and Planning!

**There was a buzz in the air.** You could sense a comfortable atmosphere as people sat around talking and catching up.

Then the pizzas arrived! Chatting was replaced by chomping!

A little while later we turned to more formal business and did some serious planning and evaluating. Notes were recorded on butchers' paper around the wall. Decisions and plans were made and agreements recorded.

Twice a year we meet with Deborah over a pizza meal to chew the fat and make some plans. She invites along her advocates and local unpaid allies. Her support workers come too.

After the meal we always begin with Deborah sharing her hopes and aspirations. Then her advocates and allies are invited to give their perspectives. Finally the roles of the paid workers are arranged based on the perspectives shared during the evening.

Deborah is a woman we support at *A Place to Belong*. When she was granted a support package by *Disability Services Queensland* in 2000 she was semi-homeless and highly vulnerable. It was a shopkeeper in the city who had struck up a friendship with her who helped her fill in her application for support.

In the five years since then Deborah has – with support – consolidated her life. She now lives in a secure unit, has a lease, owns pets, has a telephone, has her own bank account and attends some local community events.

This is what Deborah says about her life now...

***'A Place To Belong' has helped me with shopping, money and home. I like my own house – I can see the city and I have my own clothes-line. I have 4 pets – 2 lovebirds and 2 budgies, they are beautiful.***

***I don't like to be hassled on Wednesday night. I will not open the door or answer my phone because Blue Heelers is on. I love that show!***

***I used to live in institutions and hostels and I used to have to do things by the rules. I like living in my house, I can choose what I want to do but not make a lot of noise.***

***'A Place To Belong' has helped me do a computer course and I go to the markets on the weekend.***

***I am getting a Hi-fi system soon and I have a lot of cd's and I am still buying more.***

***I have bad days when I don't want to talk to anyone and I have good days. I know I don't get it right but I try to be a good person.***

**Why have things gone so well? Some of the factors might be that:**

- We have worked with Deborah on her agendas from the beginning – like getting a bank account and control of her money.
- We have worked at being very flexible and responsive and have also challenged Deborah.
- We have made our aim to work with Deborah for *the good life* – which means having worthwhile things to do, people to be with and things to look forward to.
- We live with the chaos, the mess, the unresolved stuff...having a ten year vision rather than a one year vision.
- We have marshalled resources – paid and unpaid.
- We have brought in responsive, cooperative, respectful people into her life – for a range of roles – even if for just short periods.
- We have searched for and supported 'sweet welcoming spots' in her locality, knowing that the context is critical.
- *Disability Services Queensland* have adequately resourced us for this work.

We listen to Morrie O'Connor's challenge:

*We in the non-government sector have developed a rare talent for setting up services that keep people passive, isolated and recipient rather than connected and enabled. And yet we know that the best solving of problems is where those concerned do it themselves; the most hopeful citizens are those who can have an influence; the most secure citizens are those who have a stake; the citizens who feel most appreciated have a valued social role.*

It's a vision worth working towards, isn't it?

(Deborah's story has been used with her consent)

## News from the Self Harm Support Group

In February the self harm support group will celebrate two years of operation. We meet every Tuesday night between 6 and 8 pm at the premises of *A Place To Belong*, 69 Thomas St, West End.

For the last two years, aside from the support group meetings, members of the group have been involved in giving talks and facilitating discussion with various community groups and individuals who are interested in why people choose this form of coping mechanism to deal with their lives. We receive great feedback, mostly very privately, from individuals who self harm and the people who care about them because we have managed to make sense of this behaviour for them and given them some hope for the future.

Often people who self harm have difficulty forming honest and long lasting relationships with others. The main aim of the group – the aim which has slowly evolved out of this group, over time – is to provide a place of safety and acceptance where individuals can come and reveal themselves and be welcomed and thought worthwhile – possibly something that has not truly happened for them before. Five of our members have just spent a weekend away at Bribie Island. Good fun, conversation, weather, food and lovely water provided us with another opportunity to get to know each other a little more closely.

Our Christmas break-up was a cooling and relaxing afternoon and evening at Southbank, shared by members of the group and family and friends.

Through these and many other shared experiences together – the rough and the smooth – we build together the love, respect and understanding for each other and ourselves that enables us to move forward more wholly in the world.

We wish you all an enriching and loving 2006.

*The Self Harm Support Group*

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**Playing a role in people's recovery.** Do you want to offer your little bit in mental health? If so, pencil in the 5<sup>th</sup> February. This is a fantastic opportunity for you to find out how you can play a role. Come along and hear someone's story, receive some training, and be inspired to do your bit. (2-4:30pm at the Community Precinct, Chippendall St., Milton—see brochure for more detail).

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## Building Community Relationships

**Many people we work with are excluded from community life. Our vision is to work with people towards becoming active citizens in the associational life of our democratic society.**

Some excluded people have been able to forge a heroic path into community life on their own. Some others have some family support or a few friends who have a vision for their inclusion. However, many of the people we work with have no 'guide' to walk with them towards inclusion. Effective guides bring a person into the web of associational life that can act as a powerful force in a person's life.

Guides focus on people's strengths. They are often well-connected and trusted by others in community life. Guides also believe strongly that community is a reservoir of resources and hospitality.

Our aim is to find, restore or initiate community links that lead to a life that is lived in such a way that the unique creativity of each person is a contribution to others. Our goal should be clear. *We are seeking nothing less than a life surrounded by the richness and diversity of community. A collective life. A common life. An everyday life. (John McKnight)*

This is why our mission statement is an important expression of our intent: -

***Our mission is to encourage the building of a society where the acknowledgement of our common brokenness and the treasuring of our uniqueness are accepted as being fundamental to each person's wholeness.***

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## Stephen Heap's Story

*In July 2005 Stephen rode from Brisbane to Cairns with our mental health bike ride team. He shared his story at a number of events along the way. On his return he felt confident enough to seek—and gain—full-time employment.*

**Early in 2004 I was living a reclusive life in my unit, struggling daily and painfully with my mental health. The only time that I would leave the unit was fortnightly shop with my brother, and the occasional visit to my case-manager. To venture out into the front yard to collect the mail caused me pain and stress and required a great summoning of strength and nerve. Using public transport was a huge challenge and travelling invariably caused me major panic attacks (I would need to get off the bus way before it was anywhere near my destination.)**

I first met Neil Barringham, organiser of the *Go The Journey Together*, Brisbane to Cairns Bike Ride 2005, when I was considering a bike ride to Sydney to support Brook RED. The Brook RED Centre is a local mental health facility where I am involved. My case manager had linked me in with Neil when he realised how serious I was about going on a long bike ride. After meeting with Neil, I started training. I was commuting up to 30km a day beforehand but now increased that distance. Neil linked me up with Bill Webb, a Community Resource Officer with *Disability Services Queensland*, who was also interested in the Brisbane to Cairns bike ride. We started training together at the Murarrie Bike circuit; Bill was so inspired that he decided to also do the ride rather than simply be one of the support team.

The *Go The Journey Together*, Brisbane to Cairns Bike ride gave me the incentive to get out and train almost every day of the week. I now found myself training up to 50 kilometres a day. Towards the latter part of preparation I had covered 150 kilometres in one day. Because of the regular training and increased fitness, I found myself a lot more capable in what would have once been stressful situations. My confidence and my self-esteem improved and I was able to maintain my composure in social activities. I was able to meet up with some of the *Go The Journey Together* riders to train and to talk about the ride. Towards the end of my preparation, I rode 20 kilometres to Mt Gravatt, scaled bottom to the summit 8 times and then rode home; it was at this stage that I began to feel confident I was able to participate in the *Go The Journey Together* bike ride.

We left Suncorp Stadium on Saturday the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, riding first to Pelican Park, Redcliffe with other invited groups of riders, including Anna Bligh – Deputy Premier of Queensland. From here, the core group of 8 riders continued on to Caloundra As we traversed back East and crossed the Gympie Highway to Caloundra, it hit me: here I was actually riding a bicycle with a group of dedicated people, fellow riders, support crew and other awareness raising people, all the way up the East Coast of Queensland from Brisbane to Cairns! It was such an emotional moment for me and it brought tears of joy to my eyes.

During the ride I was able to share the following story at community events:

*As a person with a mental illness, I have had periods in my life when I could see no hope for the future. I have spent long periods of time in hospitals undergoing treatments, and I had isolated myself as a result of my feelings. There have been times in my life when I, for whatever reason, have felt that my only option was to give in. In a way I had folded to the stigmas and common misconceptions of the vast majority of the population.*

*I now take full responsibility for my illness. And with my own coping strategies – my bike riding, diet and physical health, my peer support network, my relationships, my doctors, my medication, I am able to honestly say that I am just as capable of achieving my goals as is anyone else.*

*There are no barriers to achieving your goals just because you have a mental illness. We have wants and needs, as does anyone else. All that it takes is some commitment. Never underestimate your own potential, simply get involved in something, however small or trivial it may seem – this is a key to wellness. I can assure you, that only 3 years ago no one, least of all me, would have expected that I would be riding a bicycle to Cairns, but here I am. It wasn't easy, I needed commitment and dedication but I got there. Follow your dreams whatever they may be.*

